

Frequently asked questions – financial support for Senedd Support Staff

December 2023

At its meeting on 30 November the Independent Remuneration Board of the Senedd agreed a package of financial support measures for Senedd Support Staff to help address high living costs, both now and in future. Information is provided below on the measures agreed by the Board including detailed information for Support Staff on how these measures will be rolled out.

For further information please contact remuneration@senedd.wales.

Cost of living support

The Board agreed to provide Support Staff with a payment of £600 in January 2024, pro-rated in accordance with contracted hours of work, to help meet increased living costs. This represents a one-off payment of 2.7% to Support Staff on Band 3 Pay Point 1, in addition to two previous pro-rated payments of £600 to Support Staff in January and April 2023 with the second of those payments consolidated into Support Staff salaries from 1 April 2024.

The payment to be made in January 2024 will be included in payroll, paid on the last working day of the month (or spread across January, February and/or March pay if requested), and will not be consolidated into salaries. If a member of Support Staff wishes to spread the payment, they should email MBS-HR@senedd.wales by no later than **17:00 on 12 January 2024**.

The Board's decision to provide this payment of £600 in January 2024 reflects the significant financial pressures faced by Support Staff due to high living costs.

Real Living Wage salary increases for 2023-24

The Board is committed to ensuring all staff should be paid at least the Real Living Wage (RLW). For the first time, following the recent RLW annual review, the RLW has exceeded Band 3 Pay Point 1 for support staff.

The Board therefore agreed to:

- Provide for a temporary uplift of Band 3 Pay Point 1 to the level of the RLW from 1 December 2023 to 31 March 2024. This raises Band 3 Pay Point 1 to £23,088. This change will be reflected in December salary payments to those affected.
- Provide for a one-off payment to Support Staff who received the Band 3 Pay Point 1 salary in November 2023, calculated individually for each member of staff, equal to the difference between the salary received for November 2023 and the salary that would have been received if the RLW had been applied from 1 November 2023. This will be included in December's salary payments. The effect is that staff will receive payments as though they were paid at the RLW level from 1 November.
- This would be a temporary arrangement until 1 April 2024, when Band 3 Pay Point 1 would move to the proposed new 2024-25 pay levels (which, subject to consultation, would see all pay points above the RLW).
- Consult on a change to the Determination for 2024-25 to ensure that should a future annual RLW review see RLW increase above the lowest pay point, that the pay point would automatically adjust to the RLW.

These decisions are to enable Members to pay all staff at a level that is at least in line with the Real Living Wage, without pre-empting any wider changes to the pay and grading structure that might be recommended once the review of Members' Staff Pay and Grading has concluded.

Salary increases for 2024-25

The Board agreed to remove the 3% salary cap and increase salaries for all Support Staff by 5.7 per cent for 2024-25, in line with the average salary increase in Wales during the past 12 months (based on the median Annual Survey of Household Earnings, ASHE, data published by the Office for National Statistics in November 2023). Inclusive of the previously agreed consolidation of £600 cost of living in pay points from 1 April, this would be a pay increase of between 6.9%-8.6% depending on pay points.

This decision is subject to consultation with Members, Support Staff and other stakeholders as part of a wider consultation on the Determination on Members' Pay and Allowances for 2024-25. A final decision on the increase to Support Staff salaries will be taken by the Board in February 2024, in light of responses to the consultation, and reflected in the Determination for 2024-25 to be published in March 2024.

FAQs on the cost of living payment

Why are Support Staff receiving this additional payment?

- Over recent years the cost of living has soared as a result of high inflation and other factors, for example energy costs, the cost of food and the cost of travel. The Board usually increases Support Staff salaries once a year only. A flat-rate payment is intended to help Support Staff meet high living costs in the short-term, and during the winter months, until salary increases take effect on 1 April 2024.
- The Board believes this payment is the correct balance between enabling Support Staff to meet the increased costs of living whilst also meeting the Board's value for money obligations.

Will all Support Staff receive the payment?

- All support staff in employment on 30 November 2023 will receive the payment, including those who leave their post between this date and the date on which the payment is made (end of January). Support Staff who commence their employment after 30 November will not receive this payment.
- Those Support Staff who work for more than one Member of the Senedd will receive one payment only. The payment will reflect the total, combined contracted hours of Support Staff between different posts, for those holding more than one post.

Will all support staff get the same amount?

- No. The payment will be pro-rated according to each individual Support Staff's contracted hours of work. This means staff working full-time will receive the full £600 whilst staff working part-time will receive a proportion of this amount commensurate to their contracted hours of work (as at 30 November 2023).

Will this payment be added to Support Staff salaries after this financial year?

- No, this will be a one-off payment to be made in January 2024 and will not be added to Support Staff salaries for future financial years.

- A previous payment of £600 provided to Support Staff on 1 April 2023 will be consolidated into Support Staff salaries from 1 April 2024, meaning all Support Staff pay points will increase by an additional £600 on 1 April 2024.

Will the payment be subject to deductions?

- Yes, deductions that are normally made to Support Staff salaries (for example National Insurance Contributions and Income Tax) will also apply to this flat rate payment. The payment will not be subject to pension contributions.

Will I receive the payment in one-lump sum or can I be paid in instalments?

- You can choose to spread the payments if you so wish. The payment will be automatically made in one instalment on 31 January 2024, via payroll unless you inform email MBS-HR@senedd.wales by 17:00 on 12 January that you wish to decline the payment, delay it or spread the payment in instalments across several months, between January, February or March.

When will the payment be made?

- On 31 January 2024, via payroll. The payment may be declined, delayed or paid in instalments across several months, between January, February or March if you have emailed MBS-HR@senedd.wales by 17:00 on 12 January 2024.

If Support Staff are on maternity/parental/adoption/sick leave, will their payment be affected?

- All Support Staff in employment on 30 November 2023 will receive the payment.
- Any member of Support Staff currently on any form of maternity/shared parental/adoption leave is treated for the purposes of the payment as having been in work on 30 November 2023, and will have their contracted hours reflected in their payment.
- Similarly, any Support Staff member who was absent on 30 November 2023 due to illness will have their contracted hours reflected in the payment.

Will the payment affect eligibility for Universal Credit or other benefits?

- It is possible that the payment could affect eligibility for benefits that is linked to income and thresholds for loan repayments (e.g. Student Loans). It is likely that most individuals will be better off overall receiving this payment but it is important that Support Staff ensure they understand their own personal financial circumstances to ensure they will not be disadvantaged by receiving this additional payment. It is the responsibility of the individual to seek independent advice on how the payment may affect their personal financial circumstances.
- The payment will be made to all Support Staff via payroll. If any member of Support Staff wish to decline the payment or request that it is paid in instalments during the remainder of the financial year rather than as one single payment, you will need to email MBS-HR@senedd.wales by 17:00 on 12 January 2024. Any notification that you wish to decline the payment or receive it in instalments will need to be in writing and received by 12 January 2024.

What other support is available?

- The Senedd Commission have put in place other measures such as access to independent financial advice and financial wellbeing workshops as well as links to other organisations that can provide support and guidance.
- Further details are available on the [Members intranet](#).

FAQs re Real Living Wage salary increases for 2023-24

What is the Real Living Wage?

- The Real Living Wage is based on the cost of living and is voluntarily paid by over 14,000 UK employers. It is independently calculated by the Resolution Foundation and published annually by the Living Wage foundation. On the 24 October 2023, the new Real Living Wage rate for 2023-24 was announced to be £12 per hour. Accredited employers have up to 6 months to take any necessary action to align pay scales with the new rate.
- The Real Living Wage is different to the National Living Wage, which is set by the UK Government, and is a legally required minimum wage. In November 2023, the UK Chancellor announced that the National Living Wage will increase to £11.44 an hour from April 2024.

Why is the Board taking action in relation to the Real Living Wage?

- It is the Board's view that the staff pay and grading framework set out in the Determination should enable Members to pay all Support Staff at the Real Living Wage. Based on the latest Real Living Wage rate of £12 per hour, Band 3 Pay Point 1 falls below the Real Living Wage rate for the first time.
- Based on a 37 hour working week, the Real Living Wage amounts to an annual salary of £23,088. In the 2023-24 Determination, Band 3 Pay Point 1 is £21,862.

Why is Band 3 pay point 1 being temporarily uplifted?

- The Board has decided to apply a temporary uplift to Band 3 Pay Point 1, to immediately bring this salary in line with the newly announced Real Living Wage rate. This will ensure that all Support Staff are paid at least at the Real Living Wage rate and enable Members to advertise pay scales that are in line with the Real Living Wage.
- Subject to consultation the Board has proposed that from 1 April 2024, Support Staff pay points are uplifted in line with the latest Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) figures for Wales, which will mean a 5.7% increase. This is on top of a consolidated £600 cost of living payment, to take effect on 1 April 2024.
- This action would bring all pay points above the RLW rate from 1 April 2024. Band 3 Pay Point 1 will be £23,742.

Why is only Band 3 pay point 1 being uplifted?

- This temporary uplift to the Band 3 pay point 1 salary will ensure that all Support Staff are paid at least at the rate of the Real Living Wage. Band 3 Pay Point 1 is the only pay point that falls below the Real Living Wage rate announced on 24 October 2023.

Is this not likely to happen again next year for the lowest pay point?

- The Board will be consulting on changes to the Determination for 2024-25 to ensure that should a future annual RLW review see RLW increase above the lowest pay point, that the pay point would automatically adjust to the RLW.
- In addition, a comprehensive review of the Support Staff pay and grading structure is already underway, with phase one being led by industry experts Beamans. The Real Living Wage will be a consideration as part of this review and inform any recommendations for a revised pay and grading structure and how annual indexation operates.

What impact does this action have on the differentials between the pay point salaries in Band 3?

- Changing Band 3 Pay Point 1 does impact on the pay differential between pay point 1 and 2. Between December 2023 and March 2024 (inclusive), the difference between Band 3 pay points 1 and 2 reduces from £1693 to £467.
- From 1 April 2024 the current pay differential between Band 3 Pay Points 1 and 2 will be re-established as salary uplifts for 2024-25 are based on the pay scales set out in the 2023-24 Determination, which took effect on 1 April 2023.
- The Board has decided that a temporary measure is the most appropriate course of action in order not to pre-empt the outcome of the ongoing review of the pay and grading structure,.

From which point will staff be paid the Real Living Wage?

- The decision to temporarily uplift Band 3 Pay Point 1 for the remainder of the financial year was taken at the Remuneration Board meeting on 30 November.
- The Board agreed that this temporary uplift should apply from the beginning of the first full calendar month following the announcement of the revised Real Living Wage rate i.e. November 2023.
- The Board therefore agreed that the uplift would apply from the start of the nearest calendar month, which would be the 1 December and agreed an additional one-off sum equivalent to the difference between the RLW and the Band 3 Pay Point 1 salary during November. This will be paid in the December pay. The effect is that eligible staff will receive payments as though they were paid at the RLW level from 1 November.